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Who wants to be a mentor? An examination of attitudinal, instrumental, and social motivational components

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Abstract

Purpose – This study investigates the influence of affective organizational commitment, career aspirations, and networking activities on propensity to mentor (serving as a mentor and desiring to become a mentor).

Design/methodology/approach – Data from websurveys of 262 managerial employees of a Dutch bank are analyzed using logistic regression.

Findings – Results indicate that affective organizational commitment is unrelated to propensity to mentor, whereas career aspirations are positively related, and networking activities are negatively related to serving as a mentor, but not desiring to be a mentor.

Research limitations/implications – The study is limited by its reliance on self-report data and the Dutch culture may have influenced the results of the study to an unknown degree.

Practical implications – Results of this study suggest that employees volunteering to be a mentor are clearly ambitious in terms of their own career, but are not necessarily highly committed to their organization nor do they perform exemplary behaviors in terms of extra role behavior or networking.

Originality/value – Individuals are more likely to engage in mentoring activities and to desire to become a mentor if they have high career aspirations. This relationship may be the result of an instrumental perspective on the part of the mentor, who sees developing a cadre of loyal and supportive organizational members as having a positive effect on his or her own career advancement.

Keywords Mentoring, Motivation (psychology), Gender, The Netherlands

Paper type Research paper

Studies in mentoring have been focused on possible positive effects of mentoring for career, e.g. for positive career outcomes but also for health and the reduction of stress. However, mentoring may also be a valuable tool to be used when employees are confronted with adverse working conditions. Extending the applicability of mentoring to such conditions not only adds a dimension to the comprehensive phenomenon of



mentoring, but also shows that mentoring can be a viable option for those employees who do not have excellent career opportunities or who suffer from stress and burnout (Van Emmerik, 2004).

Who wants to be
a mentor?

There has been a great deal of research in recent years on mentoring relationships. The traditional model of a mentoring relationship (Kram, 1985; Levinson *et al.*, 1978) is a dyadic relationship in which a more experienced member of an organization or profession takes an interest in a less experienced individual and provides both career and psychosocial support to that individual (Allen *et al.*, 2004; Fagenson, 1992; Hunt and Michael, 1983; Mullen, 1994; Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Protégés enjoy more positive career experiences than non-protégés with respect to both objective and subjective indicators of career success. Compared to those who have not been involved in a mentoring relationship, protégés report greater career satisfaction, career commitment, career expectations, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions (Allen *et al.*, 2004; Baugh *et al.*, 1996; Fagenson, 1988; Koberg *et al.*, 1998; Noe, 1988a; Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Whitely and Coetsier, 1993). In addition, protégés also experience greater objective career benefits than non-protégés, including higher salaries, more promotions, and better job performance (Burke, 1984; Dreher and Ash, 1990; Fagenson, 1988; Scandura, 1992; Turban and Dougherty, 1994; Whitely *et al.*, 1991). The underlying and often not addressed assumption in these studies is that mentoring has mainly possible effects for protégés, and that costs are basically investments in terms of resources (time of both protégé and mentor and organizational costs). This approach may well be far too simple, as it neglects possible self-serving motives of mentors and related mentoring strategies and content. Dependent on the motives, attitude and approach of a mentor, the relation might be beneficial for protegee and organization, or have detrimental effects in terms of increased dissatisfaction over careers and related work stress. This is not unlikely to happen as mentoring typically is a voluntary activity and there are no standards or training mentors have to match. Therefore, a potential risk, as in any helping relation, is that mentors primarily are self-oriented and “help” their clients based on their own idiosyncratic approaches. Given this lack of attention, this study primarily focuses on the motives of the mentor.

The focus on the protégé has dominated empirical research on mentoring, despite suggestions to focus on both members of the dyad (Allen *et al.*, 1997; Hunt and Michael, 1983; Ragins and Scandura, 1994). Although researchers acknowledge that not all experienced organizational members become mentors (Aryee *et al.*, 1996; Ragins and Cotton, 1993), relatively little empirical attention has been directed to identifying the factors that influence the propensity to mentor. This omission is quite puzzling, given that willingness to mentor is a necessary condition for the initiation and development of mentoring relationships, and there is evidence that individuals differ in this regard (Ragins and Scandura, 1999).

The focus of the current investigation is on those factors which influence propensity to mentor among a sample of Dutch bank employees. We will look at factors which are associated with both serving as a mentor and desiring to become a mentor. We suggest that there are attitudinal, instrumental, and social components to the propensity to mentor and investigate the influence of one aspect of each component. Further, we will explore possible gender effects, as it is important to determine if men and women are

motivated to engage in mentoring by different factors (Ragins and Cotton, 1993; Ragins and Scandura, 1994).

Propensity to engage in mentoring

Most mentoring relationships are not mandated within organizations. Even in formal mentoring programs, there is normally some element of choice with respect to participation in the program (Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Ragins *et al.*, 2000). Serving as a mentor is an extra-role activity that goes above and beyond the mentor's formal job requirements (Allen, 2003; Aryee *et al.*, 1996). Since these developmental relationships are rarely mandated, it is important to determine why individuals make choices to engage in them.

It is reasonable to expect that the decision to serve as a mentor is influenced by the outcomes the mentor anticipates from this activity. The literature suggests that there are benefits to be gained from serving as a mentor, including career enhancement, information, esteem, and personal satisfaction (Hunt and Michael, 1983; Kram, 1985; Levinson *et al.*, 1978; Mullen, 1994; Zey, 1984). Propensity to engage in mentoring is associated with costs, as well as with benefits, and some individuals find that the costs outweigh the benefits (Ragins and Scandura, 1999).

Some dispositional antecedents to the propensity to mentor might also be expected. Aryee *et al.* (1996) found a positive relationship between altruism and motivation to mentor. A more recent investigation found that personality factors exerted very little influence over provision of mentoring functions, however (Bozionelos, 2004). Based on this more comprehensive investigation, it seems likely that the propensity to mentor is more strongly associated with more malleable factors than it is by stable predispositions, such as personality. We propose three types of factors influencing the propensity for individuals to engage in mentoring:

- (1) attitudinal;
- (2) instrumental; and
- (3) social components of the propensity to mentor.

Attitudinal component of the propensity to mentor

The attitudinal component of propensity to mentor refers to the influence of reactions to the work environment on willingness to mentor. One attitudinal response which has been found to enhance willingness to engage in extra-role behaviors is organizational commitment (Mowday *et al.*, 1979, 1982). Mentoring is a type of extra-role behavior, and thus greater organizational commitment should be associated with propensity to mentor.

Affective organizational commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment to the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990), and is an important determinant of dedication and loyalty. Affectively committed employees have a sense of belonging and identification that increases their involvement in the organization's activities and their willingness to exert effort to achieve the organization's goals (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2001). Based on this conceptualization of affective commitment, it can be expected that individuals scoring high on affective commitment will be more likely to be motivated to mentor.

H1. Affective commitment will be positively related to the propensity to mentor. Who wants to be a mentor?

Instrumental component of the propensity to mentor

Instrumentality is the second component of the propensity to mentor. Instrumentality suggests a utilitarian function of mentoring, seeking to enhance one's own career-related benefits. Theoretical and empirical work suggests that providing mentoring entails benefits for the careers of mentors (Blackburn *et al.*, 1981; Bozionelos, 2004; Frey and Nollens, 1986; Mullen, 1994; Mullen and Noe, 1999). Mentors who have high aspirations regarding their own career advancement may exhibit greater propensity to become a mentor (Allen *et al.*, 1997). Successful mentoring can enhance the reputation and advance the career of the mentor (Dreher and Ash, 1990; Kram, 1985), along with potentially providing opportunities to exercise power and influence (Hunt and Michael, 1983).

H2. Career advancement aspirations will be positively related to the propensity to mentor.

Social component of the propensity to mentor

The social component of the propensity to mentor refers to the potential for mentoring to expand and enhance one's social relationships. In the present study, we will examine the engagement in social networking as a typical example of a social component of the propensity to mentor.

Social networking refers to the building and nurturing of personal and professional relationships to create a system of information, contact, and support thought to be crucial for career and personal success (Whiting and De Janasz, 2004). Networking increases exposure to other people within the organization, which may in turn enhance understanding of organizational practices, lead to greater skill development, and provide greater role clarity (Lankau and Scandura, 2002). It seems plausible, that people who actively seek out opportunities for interaction on the job, that is people who substantially engage in social networking activities, may also more likely to be motivated by the opportunity to extend one's network that mentoring offers. Also, more opportunities for interaction on the job may result in more opportunities to mentor, which in turn may affect the propensity to mentor (Aryee *et al.*, 1996).

H3. Networking behavior will be positively related to the propensity to mentor.

Gender differences

The literature on mentoring has generally been quite attentive to gender issues (Baugh *et al.*, 2003; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1997). Women and men express equivalent intentions to mentor, but women anticipate greater costs to engaging in a mentoring relationship (Ragins and Cotton, 1993). Mentoring involves an investment of time, which cannot then be used for other, more direct career-enhancing activities (Ragins and Scandura, 1999). Given the greater obstacles women face in advancing their careers (Bell and McLaughlin, 2002; Fagenson, 1993; Lewis, 2001; Ragins, 1995), it is likely that their investment in mentoring activities will have lower career benefits than those of men. Women with high career aspirations may reduce their propensity to mentor relative to men in order to focus on other career strategies.

- H4. The positive association between career advancement aspirations and the propensity to mentor will be stronger for men than for women.

Gender differences in networking activities are thought to arise from the opportunity structure within organizations (Ibarra, 1995). On average, studies in organizations show that women have more extensive networks than men, but that men's networks include more high-status, influential individuals (Ibarra, 1992; Ibarra and Smith-Lovin, 1997; Mehra *et al.*, 1998; Thomas and Higgins, 1996). As a result, men are more likely to receive career benefits from networking activities than are women (Cannings and Montmarquette, 1991; Ibarra, 1992, 1993, 1997). Hence, it is expected that the relationship between networking behaviors and the propensity to mentor will be stronger for men than for women.

- H5. The positive association between networking activity and the propensity to mentor will be stronger for men than for women.

Prior research has suggested that experience as a protégé has a positive effect on intention to mentor (Ragins and Cotton, 1993). Although research has suggested that men and women tend to be equally likely to have a mentor (Dreher and Cox, 1996; Kirchmeyer, 1996; O'Neill *et al.*, 1998), we included experience as a protégé as a control variable in this study.

Method

Population and sample

Data were collected from managerial employees within a Dutch bank. A letter was first sent to the employees explaining the purpose of the study and soliciting their participation in the study. To be able to report to the bank about gender differences within this organizations and specifically about how their female employees evaluate mentoring opportunities within the bank, responses were particularly desired from women in this setting, thus the decision was made to over-sample women. Questionnaires were then sent electronically to 691 employees (200 to men and 491 to women) in middle and upper level managerial ranks within the bank. A total of 276 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a response rate of 40 percent. Fourteen respondents were deleted due to missing data, resulting in a final sample of 262 respondents, of whom 182 (69 percent) were female and 80 (31 percent) were male. Twelve (15 percent) of the men and 17 (9 percent) of the women indicate actually being a mentor. Thirty-nine (49 percent) of the men and 89 (49 percent) of the women indicate wanting to become a mentor.

Measures

In order to ensure that the respondents were using similar definitions of the terms used in the questionnaire, the following definitions were provided:

... This questionnaire uses the concepts "mentor" and "coach" and "protégé" several times. Not everybody uses the same definitions for these concepts, therefore, we ask you to read the following definitions with care before responding to the questions. A protégé is the person who is guided and supported by a mentor or coach. A mentor is an influential individual with a higher ranking in your work environment who has advanced experience and knowledge so he/she can give you support, guidance and advice for your development. Your mentor can be from inside or outside your organization, but is not your immediate supervisor. He/she is

recognized as an expert in his/her field. Most of the mentor relations are long term and focus on general objectives of development...

Who wants to be
a mentor?

315

Propensity to mentor. The propensity to mentor was assessed with two items. The first item asked whether the respondent was actually a mentor, with a code of “1” indicating that the individual was a mentor and a code of “0” indicating that the individual was not a mentor. A second item assessed whether the respondent would like to become a mentor, with a code of “1” indicating that the individual would like to become a mentor and a code of “0” indicating that the individual would not be interesting in becoming a mentor. The absence of any formal mentoring program within the bank suggests that these relationships or desired relationships were all of an informal nature.

Affective commitment. Three items were used from the scale constructed by Allen and Meyer (1990) assessed affective commitment:

- (1) feeling at home in this organization;
- (2) feeling as if this organization’s problems are my own; and
- (3) this organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.

The internal consistency reliability (coefficient α) for this scale was 0.65.

Career advancement aspirations. Career advancement aspirations were measured with six items with a response scale of “1” (completely disagree) to “5” (completely agree). The items were:

- (1) I do things because they are good for my career;
- (2) I am prepared to change job functions within this company;
- (3) With my knowledge and experience, I can easily change over to a job outside of this company;
- (4) I am prepared to combine work with other tasks/functions;
- (5) I want to continue working in my current job function (reverse coded); and
- (6) I want to move higher in the company hierarchy in the near future.

The internal consistency reliability for this scale was 0.70.

Networking activity. Networking activity was inventoried with five items:

- (1) I try to keep contacts warm that might come in handy in the near future;
- (2) if somebody has done something for me, I always call or send a thank you note to that person;
- (3) I accept almost all invitations for receptions and drinks – you never know who you might meet;
- (4) if I came across information in which somebody else who I know is interested, I would pass it through to that person; and
- (5) I am a member of several clubs, associations and networks that can benefit my career.

The internal consistency reliability for this scale was 0.66.

Experience as a protégé. Respondents were asked if they either currently had a mentor or had ever had a mentor. Responses which indicated experience with

CDI

10,4

a mentoring relationship were coded “1” and responses which indicated no such experience were coded “0.”

Demographic variables. Demographic information was also collected in the questionnaire. Respondents indicated their age in years and their gender. Gender was coded “1” for female and “0” for male.

316

Factor analysis results

The three scales used to measure affective commitment, career advancement, and networking behaviors were all self-reported and collected at a single point in time, raising concerns about the influence of common method variance on the results of this study. Harman’s one-factor test was conducted to investigate this possibility. We entered all the items of the three scales into a single factor analysis. If a substantial amount of common method variance exists in the data, either a single factor will emerge or one general factor will account for the majority of the variance among the variables (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986).

The factor analysis yielded three factors accounting for 47 percent of the variance, with all items loading on the appropriate scales. The first factor accounted for only 22 percent of the variance, suggesting that a general factor did not account for the majority of the variance. These results indicate that common method variance is unlikely to be a serious threat to validity.

Results

Table I presents means, standard deviations and intercorrelations for the study variables. As indicated in the table, serving as a mentoring and desire to serve as a mentor are positively and significantly correlated. Serving as a mentor is also positively and significantly correlated to experience as a protégé and career advancement aspirations. Desire to become a mentor is positively and significantly correlated to experience as a protégé, career advancement aspirations, and networking behaviors.

Table II shows the means and standard deviations for the study variables for men and women separately. As can be seen from Table II, women are significantly younger

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Is now a mentor	0.11	0.31							
Wants to be a mentor	0.49	0.50	0.36**						
Gender	0.69	0.46	−0.08	0.00					
Age	39.11	6.99	0.04	0.06	−0.33**				
Experience as a protégé	0.24	0.43	0.26**	0.31**	0.02	−0.17**			
Affective commitment	3.85	0.72	0.03	0.11	−0.04	0.08	−0.02		
Career advancement aspirations	3.02	0.72	0.23**	0.35**	0.09	−0.40**	0.34**	−0.04	
Networking activity	3.43	0.63	−0.01	0.19**	0.05	−0.13*	0.23**	0.20**	0.34**

Table I.

Descriptive data and intercorrelations for study variables^a

Notes:

^an=260; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

than men (mean for women is 37.6 years, SD = 5.9; mean for men is 42.6 years, SD = 7.9). As a result, we included age as a control variable in the regression analyses conducted to test our hypotheses.

Both outcome variables were dichotomous and logistic regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses (Table III). In both regression analyses, gender, age, experience as a protégé, affective commitment, career advancement aspirations, and networking behaviors were entered in step 1. The two interaction variables, the interaction of gender and career advancement and the interaction of gender and networking behaviors, were entered in step 2. Hosmer and Lemeshow's (H and L) chi-square statistic was estimated at each step as an indication of goodness of fit. If the chi-square statistic is non-significant (a probability value greater than 0.05), then the model's estimates provide an acceptable fit to the data. The use of R^2 , the multiple correlation coefficient, is well established in classical regression analysis. For logistic regression, pseudo R^2 measures have to be used to evaluate the proportion of explained variance.

Step 1 (Table III) for the logistic regression for serving as a mentor shows that this variable can be predicted by experience as a protégé, career advancement aspirations, and networking behaviors (chi-square = 4.66, non-significant, pseudo R^2 = 0.25). The addition of the interaction variables in step 2 adds significant prediction (Δ pseudo R^2 = 0.06), with both interaction variables contributing significantly to the improved prediction.

	Women (N = 182)	Men (N = 80)
Is now a mentor	0.09 (0.29)	0.15 (0.36)
Wants to be a mentor	0.49 (0.50)	0.49 (0.50)
Age*	37.58 (5.94)	42.59 (7.91)
Experience as a Protégé	0.25 (0.43)	0.22 (0.42)
Affective commitment	3.83 (0.75)	3.90 (0.68)
Career advancement aspirations	3.07 (0.02)	2.92 (0.74)
Networking activity	3.45 (0.62)	3.38 (0.65)

Note: **t*-test indicates a significant difference between women and men ($p < 0.01$)

Table II.
Means and standard
deviations by gender

	Is mentor		Wants to be a mentor	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Gender (G)	0.48	− 5.39*	− 0.31	− 2.12
Age	0.07	0.09*	0.10**	0.10**
Experience as a Protégé	− 1.60**	− 1.67**	− 1.31**	− 1.32**
Affective commitment	0.26	0.41	0.37	0.38
Career advancement aspirations	1.38**	2.44**	1.36**	1.82**
Networking activity	− 0.93**	− 2.06**	0.10	0.18
Gender × career aspirations	−	− 1.51*	−	− 0.54
Gender × networking activity	−	1.89*	−	− 0.10
Hosmer and Lemeshow chi-square	4.66	6.38	19.08*	13.75
Δ Nagelkerke R^2	0.25**	0.31**	0.30**	0.31**

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table III.
Results of hierarchical
logistic regression for
being a mentor and
wanting to become a
mentor (unstandardized
coefficients)

Step 1 (Table III) for the logistic regression for desire to serve as a mentor shows that this variable can be predicted by affective commitment, career advancement aspirations, and networking behavior (pseudo $R^2 = 0.30$), but the significant chi-square statistic suggests that the model is not a good fit. The chi-square statistic is reduced to non-significance by the addition of the interaction variables, but the pseudo R^2 is improved very little (Δ pseudo $R^2 = 0.01$) and neither interaction variable is individually significant. Thus, desire to become a mentor may prove to be more difficult to predict than the actual behavior of serving as a mentor.

With respect to the tests of hypotheses, *H1*, which predicted a positive relationship between affective commitment and propensity to mentor, was not supported. *H2*, which predicted a positive relationship between career aspirations and propensity to mentor, was supported for both mentoring behavior and desire to mentor. *H3* predicted a positive relationship between networking behavior and propensity to mentor. The relationship between networking activity and serving as a mentor was significant and negative, rather than positive. The relationship between networking activity and desire to be a mentor was not significant. Thus, *H3* was not supported. *H4* and *H5*, which predicted interactions between gender and career aspirations and gender and networking behavior, respectively, on propensity to mentor were supported for mentoring behavior, but not for desire to mentor. As expected, men with high career aspirations were the more likely to report serving as mentor than were women with high career aspirations.

An inspection of the relationships between experience as a protégé and serving as a mentor and desire to become a mentor in Tables I and III reveals an anomaly. The bivariate relationship between experience as a protégé and both serving as a mentor and desire to become a mentor is positive. The sign on the regression weight for experience as a protégé in both logistic regressions is negative, however. In addition, the bivariate relationship between age and desire to become a mentor is negative, but the regression weight is positive in the logistic regressions for both serving as a mentor and desire to become a mentor. While it is not clear why this reversal occurred, it is possible that age serves as a suppressor variable.

Discussion

Many organizations encourage the formation of mentoring relationships in order to attempt to reap the benefits of mentoring activities. Many have gone further, and have implemented formal mentoring programs. Effective mentoring can be highly costly to the mentor, however, in terms of both time and effort. It is, therefore, important to examine more systematically what motivates individuals to invest time and effort in providing mentoring to less experienced colleagues (Mullen, 1994).

From the results of this study, it appears that individuals who are highly committed to their organization are no more likely to offer mentoring to other organizational members than are the less committed. It seems that individuals who are highly committed to the organization should want to engage in extra-role behavior such as mentoring. Perhaps the norm of reciprocity applies more to behaviors that more directly advantage the organization as a whole, however, than those that benefit a specific individual.

Individuals are more likely to engage in mentoring activities and to desire to become a mentor if they have high career aspirations. This relationship may be the result of

an instrumental perspective on the part of the mentor, who sees developing a cadre of loyal and supportive organizational members as having a positive effect on his or her own career advancement. It is also possible the mentoring relationship develops as a result of the similarity of the mentor and the protégé with respect to career aspirations.

The results with respect to the relationship between networking activity and propensity to mentor are contrary to expectations. Individuals who are more involved in networking activities are less likely to serve as a mentor or to desire to become a mentor. Given that mentoring and networking are similar types of activities, this result is surprising. Networking, however, implies developing relationships that are potentially instrumental, but not as intense or enduring as mentoring relationships (Granovetter, 1973). It is possible that some individuals prefer to develop a larger number of relationships that are less committed, rather than investing a lot of time and effort in one very absorbing relationship.

Some gender differences are found in the results of this study, although they are not as extensive as predicted. While career aspirations positively affected propensity to mentor, high career aspirations were more strongly associated with serving as a mentor for men than for women. Possibly women do not expect as great a career “payoff” for their investment in mentoring than men do. This suggestion is in line with the literature on networking, which suggests that women do not receive as great a “payoff” for networking activity as men do (Ibarra, 1992).

The anomalous findings with respect to the relationships between propensity to mentor and both experience as a protégé and age deserve some attention. The univariate correlation of experience as a protégé was positive for both being a mentor and wanting to be a mentor, but the relationship between experience as a protégé and propensity to mentor was negative in the multivariate analysis. We included the “experience as a protégé” variable from the findings of Ragins and Cotton (1993), who showed that employees with prior experience in mentoring relationships reported greater willingness to mentor than individuals lacking mentorship experience. Perhaps in this specific organization, mentoring is a recent phenomenon and younger people are more likely to have had experience as a protégé than older individuals. The data show that experience as a protégé is negatively related to age, but age is, in general, positively related to propensity to mentor, because older individuals tend to be in the career stages which engender mentoring (Finkelstein *et al.*, 2003). Thus, people with less experience of being a protégé are in career stages that make them more likely to be a mentor. It is also possible that within the specific context of The Netherlands (which favors being young and dynamic), and given the recent popularity of mentoring, that relatively more young people desire to be a mentor. For them mentoring adds status, and is sometimes even seen as a sexy role, fulfilling narcissistic needs.

Managerial implications

Using mentoring as a human resource development tool is popular among HR managers. The effects and effectiveness of this tool depends to a large extent on the qualities and efforts of the mentors. Therefore, it is critical to define a profile and criteria for desirable mentors. Particular attention should be paid to the motives of potential mentors. Results of this study, focusing on “who wants to be a mentor”, suggest that employees volunteering are clearly ambitious in terms of their own career, but are not necessarily highly committed to their organization nor do they perform

Who wants to be
a mentor?

exemplary behaviors in terms of extra role behavior or networking. So, what are these mentors offering to their protégées?

Our results suggest that the main motive for mentors is their own career advancement; clearly a self-serving drive (Allen, 2003). Do either the protégé or the organization benefit from pursuing that end? Furthermore, given the tendency that relatively young employees want to be a mentor, what policies for selection of mentors should an organization define? It may not be effective to have relatively inexperienced people, especially those with high career aspirations, perform the mentor role, or it may be effective to have such individuals perform only some aspects of the mentor role. Organizations wishing to develop formal mentoring programs, or even to facilitate and support informal mentoring situations, should carefully consider what potential mentors have to offer and how the mentor can contribute to the protégé, and by extension to the organization itself. These concerns should be part of the selection procedure for mentors in organizations. It might be wise for management to define profiles of effective mentors and play an active role in recruiting mentors.

Our results also suggest that individuals who are less upwardly mobile, but are nonetheless strongly committed to the organization, might not readily step forward to become mentors. If mentoring is seen as a role for less experienced but ambitious employees, individuals who have strong mentoring skills but see themselves on a career plateau in terms of hierarchical advancement may not realize how valuable their contributions could be. In this case, not only would the organization lose valuable contributions to internal mentoring systems, whether formal or informal, but experienced individuals may become less involved with the organization and with their job due to a perception that their skills are not valued. Our results suggest that organizations should be mindful of such possibilities.

Another managerial implication of this study is the possible downside of mentoring relations. Particularly when mentors have clear self-serving motives, being a protégé might actually create stress. Also ambitions might be stimulated in unrealistic directions, when a mentor projects his or her own ambitions on a protégé. This might actually reduce mental health, creating unrealistic approaches of job and career expectations, and related work stress. During the economic “booming” years young professionals have entered the labor market often with high expectations and did not learn to cope with rejection and disappointments. Part of mentoring might be reality checking, and this studies raises questions about the goals and content of mentoring. Studies on the effects of mentoring so far have presupposed these relations are beneficial and have overlooked possible negative effects in terms of both raising expectations, healthy mentoring relations and job stress related to that.

Limitations

The study is limited by its reliance on self-report data. However, the result of Harman’s one factor test indicates that common method variance is unlikely to be a serious threat in this study. In addition, the significant interaction effects found in this study are unlikely to be the result of common method variance. The Dutch culture may have influenced the results of the study to an unknown degree. Comparative research on the factors influencing the propensity to mentor across national cultures appears to be needed.

Directions for future research

Clearly, the motives which underlie willingness to mentor within organizations deserve future investigation. More and more empirical attention within the mentoring literature has been directed toward the dyad itself and toward the mentor, in contrast to earlier studies which focused almost exclusively on the protégé. Despite much interest and concern on the part of organizations, however, very little empirical research has been directed toward the individual qualities or the dyadic properties of the mentoring relationship that lead to effectiveness within the relationship. Mentoring relationships which are properly developed and managed are important developmental experiences for protégés, and oftentimes for mentors, as well. Mentoring relationships which are not carefully managed and maintained may instead thwart individual development and result in significant negative outcomes to the protégé, the mentor, and the organization (Scandura, 1998). More emphasis on the mentor and on the dyad itself, in addition to research focused on protégés, will offer more insight into the nature of effective mentoring relationships.

Who wants to be
a mentor?

321

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Who wants to be
a mentor?

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